



Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/230550/>

Version: Published Version

Article:

Yetiş, E.Ö. (2025) Relocating gendered violence and anti-genderism within authoritarian populist imagination in Turkey. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 7. 1624746. ISSN: 2673-3145

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1624746>

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY

Alexandra Sipos,
HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences,
Hungary

REVIEWED BY

Tuba Kancı,
Kocaeli University, Türkiye
Melis Cin,
Lancaster University, United Kingdom

*CORRESPONDENCE

Erman Örsan Yetiş
✉ e.o.yetis@sheffield.ac.uk

RECEIVED 07 May 2025

ACCEPTED 29 July 2025

PUBLISHED 08 August 2025

CITATION

Yetiş EO (2025) Relocating gendered violence
and anti-genderism within authoritarian
populist imagination in Turkey.
Front. Polit. Sci. 7:1624746.
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2025.1624746

COPYRIGHT

© 2025 Yetiş. This is an open-access article
distributed under the terms of the [Creative
Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](#). The
use, distribution or reproduction in other
forums is permitted, provided the original
author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are
credited and that the original publication in
this journal is cited, in accordance with
accepted academic practice. No use,
distribution or reproduction is permitted
which does not comply with these terms.

Relocating gendered violence and anti-genderism within authoritarian populist imagination in Turkey

Erman Örsan Yetiş*

School of Sociological Studies, Politics and International Relations, The University of Sheffield,
Sheffield, United Kingdom

In Turkey, anti-genderism is significantly influenced by top-down political structures, which are primarily embedded within an authoritarian populist imagination in two distinct yet interconnected ways. Firstly, anti-genderism serves to re-establish the paternalistic social politics characterised by mafia-like tactics. The incumbent regime effectively holds the practical gender needs of women hostage, particularly their need for protection from violence, which is predominantly framed within the context of family-centred policies. Second, it serves to flesh out a masculine understanding of power as a form of masculinist entrenchment, relaying a will-to-power or an insistent desire to maintain power at all costs. Through masculinist entrenchment, the incumbent power normalises the arbitrary use of punitive violence against political dissidents and rivals, and it also attempts to reinforce its image of being potent and invincible amid ongoing economic, political, and social turmoil, adopting an aggressive stance. This paper offers a detailed analytical framework that examines gendered violence, anti-genderism, and authoritarian politics through a relational lens, drawing on various concepts and illustrating their relevance by discussing the case of Turkey. Resisting anti-genderism requires a more comprehensive understanding of gendered violence alongside a transformative political imagination that can potentially reverse the recent authoritarian populist imagination and build a social justice-oriented political framework. To partially achieve this, the paper concludes with a critical discussion through continuum thinking on ways to develop and disseminate such an alternative political imagination across society.

KEYWORDS

anti-gender movements, gendered violence, paternalistic social politics, authoritarian populism, feminist social justice, masculinist entrenchment

1 Introduction

Violence can be seen as anything that hinders the realisation of capabilities and life chances (Sen, 1980; Nussbaum, 2011). By this definition, we can broaden its meaning, making it much more comprehensive, interpretable, and politically charged. Conversely, the absence of violence, dangers, and threats is a vital prerequisite for accessing and enjoying the benefits of many other rights, as well as nurturing political-ethical responsibilities for the well-being of others (Yetiş and Kolluoğlu, 2022). In line with the capabilities approach, the prevention of gender-based violence should be understood through the lens of gender-based needs, which refer to the specific requirements that individuals and communities have based on their gendered experiences, social roles, positionalities, and vulnerabilities related to these roles and positionalities (Molyneux, 1984). This perspective shifts the focus from palliative interventions

and managerial techniques to proactive strategies developed through a transformative political imagination that addresses the root causes of violence. Transformative political imagination should offer a more comprehensive understanding of gendered violence, aligning with a broader social justice framework that can inspire societal change by moving beyond the generative mechanisms underlying the existing injustices present in social structures. Nevertheless, the emergence of anti-genderism as a global phenomenon that has become a prominent aspect of today's authoritarian populist movements and politics poses a significant barrier to fostering transformative political imagination and must be addressed appropriately.

Anti-gender movements and politics pose a worldwide issue, primarily arguing that the idea of 'gender' eliminates the inherent and unavoidable distinctions between men and women (Graff and Korolczuk, 2021). This opposition to the so-called gender ideology is inherently contradictory, with the concept of 'gender' perceived as dangerous to the extent that it exposes and critiques the existing global gender regime and the power relations established around it. Anti-gender politics pose a serious threat to the rights of women, LGBTQ+ individuals, migrants, refugees, and minorities, who are the most disadvantaged segments of society (Gutiérrez Rodríguez et al., 2018). Beyond preventing these targeted groups from accessing and exercising their rights, anti-gender politics can incite overt acts of violence. Turkey exemplifies the rise of anti-genderism linked to top-down politics, illustrating a trajectory that harbours both differences and similarities compared to many Western countries. Accordingly, I argue that anti-gender politics in Turkey are predominantly top-down and are integrated into social engineering processes within a majoritarian-authoritarian-securitarian (MAS) political agenda, while grassroots reception remains limited. Recent studies indicate that there is no overt or prevalent opposition to gender equality in society, or particularly among men (KONDA, 2019, 2020; O'Neil and Çarkoğlu, 2022; Sancar, 2024). Nonetheless, it is equally challenging to claim that these top-down anti-gender politics are met with outright rejection or sweeping resistance from below, considering that the government has consolidated its political power by gradually putting these politics into practice. Thus, the lack of such sweeping resistance allows MAS political climates to persist (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). Moreover, the global rise in anti-genderism, coupled with authoritarian populist imagination, reinforces similar political climates in different local contexts. For these reasons, initiating robust resistance and mobilisation against anti-genderism requires the construction and maintenance of an alternative political imagination that can dismantle the authoritarian populist one.

In this article, I will provide a detailed demonstration of how gender-based needs and issues, especially protection from violence, are taken hostage and appropriated by the logic of masculinist protection (Young, 2003; Yetiş, 2019), with mafia tactics embedded in a paternalistic framework of social politics implemented by the incumbent authoritarian regime in Turkey. In parallel with the paternalistic framework, I also claim that the authoritarian populist imagination reinvigorates a masculine understanding of power, which conveys a will to power or an insistent desire to remain in power at all costs, by normalising the arbitrary usage of punitive violence against political dissidents and rivals. It also reinforces its image of being potent and invincible in the face of ongoing economic, political, and social turmoil, adopting an aggressive stance of swashbuckling masculinity. I will employ the concept of masculinist entrenchment,

which was developed in my previous study, as exhibiting a performative dimension of authoritarian populist imagination. In light of a paternalistic framework and masculinist entrenchment, we need to discuss how the development of feminist mobilisation with a transformative political imagination against ongoing anti-genderism in Turkey is more essential and necessary than ever. Therefore, I assert that gendered violence should also be reconsidered within the contexts where anti-genderism has arisen and subsequently exacerbated it. Understanding anti-genderism as a key aspect of a specific political imagination highlights the potential for mobilising against it, revealing an alternative transformative imagination for combating anti-genderism, while also clarifying the obstacles to counter-mobilisation.

This paper introduces a nuanced analytical framework that examines gendered violence, anti-genderism, and authoritarian politics from a relational perspective, utilising various concepts and demonstrating their usefulness through the case of Turkey. First, it discusses authoritarian populism as a form of political imagination and how anti-gender politics are situated within this imagination as part of a larger top-down MAS political agenda. To resist gendered violence in a more comprehensive manner, a transformative political imagination is required that can potentially reverse the recent authoritarian populist imagination and build a social justice-oriented political framework. To achieve this, at least in part, the final section is devoted to a discussion through continuum thinking on how an alternative political imagination can be developed and disseminated throughout society.

2 Authoritarian populist imagination and MAS political agenda

Right-wing authoritarian populism is widely considered a political strategy with its polarisation logic that helps populist movements come to power or remain in power in different contexts. This type of populism is becoming increasingly prevalent globally. It is being adopted and mimicked in various contexts, from the United States, Hungary, and Poland to Brazil, India, the Philippines, and Turkey. Building on Stuart Hall's examination of the emergence of Thatcherite politics in the UK during the 1980s, authoritarian populism is characterised as an effort to create a reactionary common-sense (Hall, 2021). Having often been championed by illiberal, populist, authoritarian, and conservative political figures, right-wing politics are increasingly garnering support within the mainstream. Accordingly, authoritarian tendencies and a will-to-power based on these tendencies are gradually entrenched and dispersed. More recently, we have witnessed how they threaten democratic institutions and undermine the rule of law by encouraging punitive violence against social movements resisting these tendencies (Yetiş, 2025a). Even if these tendencies have been predominantly problematised after their appearance in Western democracies, especially following the Trump administration in the United States, authoritarian populism has already been at work in many non-Western, Global South contexts, as well as various resistance practices in response to it (Machado and Vargas-Maia, 2023). The grassroots reception of authoritarian populism in Western democracies is often explained as a symptom of being or feeling left behind (Morrison, 2022). These explanations are overwhelmingly based on the failure of neoliberal

politics that exacerbate precarious conditions, alongside a relative improvement in women's rights and gender equality, as well as social and political visibility of LGBTQ+ people, ethnic minorities and immigrants in different public domains. As such, these explanations highlight shared feelings of grievance among groups that previously held relatively privileged social status based on their race, ethnicity and gender. Conversely, existing authoritarian tendencies in non-Western contexts are *fatalistically normalised* (Yetiş and Bakırhoğlu, 2023) as pathologies stemming from their lack of well-developed democratic systems, thereby disrupting their connection with emerging authoritarian tendencies in Western democracies. Far-right ideologies associated with authoritarian populism are often thought to be confined to specific areas (Campos, 2023), commonly distinguishing between Europe and the Middle East, despite their intertwined histories of migration, colonialism, and globalisation. Although certain expressions of right-wing politics in the Middle East are framed as cultural and viewed as 'regional', they are often seen as 'exceptional' in relation to the generally democratic and 'modern' political context of Europe (Al-Ali et al., 2025). Despite the contextual differences, they ought to be understood in relation to each other as a shared political imagination, and it is essential to recognise that anti-genderism complements this authoritarian populist politics.

Hereby, I suggest considering authoritarian populism as a form of political imagination (Sakki and Hakoköngäs, 2025), distinct from a political strategy, which involves world-making discursive practices that render preexisting socio-political boundaries more concrete and severe, based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, as well as different lifestyles and worldviews. These boundaries erode social trust and collective efficacy by perpetuating social distance between different groups. Approaching authoritarian populism as a political imagination offers an analytical framework for understanding how these authoritarian tendencies manifest across various contexts. This approach enables us to distinguish between the various forms of these tendencies while also revealing the connections among them (Yetiş, 2025a). I argue that authoritarian populism, as a political imagination, not only operates through its polarising logic but also paralyses thought processes for alternative imaginings and entraps people in its mind-confusing maze, preventing them from seeing through these connections in the continuum. The confusion created by authoritarian populist imagination is likely to reorient people into the very same logic of simplistic divisions that reinforce the preexisting socio-political boundaries between groups. Accordingly, I also claim that resisting these tendencies and finding a way out of this mind-confusing maze requires alternative transformative political imaginings (ibid).

To support my argument, I will illustrate how authoritarian populist imagination in Turkey is at play and how the incumbent regime has governed the country for over two decades with its MAS political agenda (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). First, aligning with the majoritarian agenda, the political imagination capitalises on a polarising logic and operatively target various groups who stand up against the regime as some marginal groups and depict them as estranged from traditional social values and norms enshrined in the discourse of 'homegrown and national', allegedly signifying the majority of the society (that is, Turkish Sunni Muslim). Secondly, beyond this polarising logic, an authoritarian agenda cultivates a sense of omnipotence over nearly every aspect of society (including personal matters) and enables political power to intrude into citizens' lives

through violence and to operate above the law, which I conceptualise as the masculinist entrenchment of power. Thus, nobody's rights are safeguarded by the rule of law in this authoritarian agenda. Consequently, demonstrating loyalty to political power and even endorsing its policies becomes essential for reaping rewards, while expressing discontent or criticism often results in severe punishments. Third, the securitarian agenda aligns with majoritarian and authoritarian objectives by constructing conspiracies that portray LGBTQ+ communities and feminist movements as agents of external threats. These groups are depicted as part of an imagined terrorist network targeting society, the nation, and the family, the latter of which is considered the foundational unit of the former two. This securitarian agenda leverages the concept of terrorism to target both real and imaginary enemies, generating political agitation and moral panic grounded in fear and anxiety that can mobilise people toward its political agenda. It also signals to the public the boundaries set by political power and indicates what constitutes permissible and legitimate use of violence by enacting swashbuckling masculinity, as well as against whom, as part of dog-whistle tactics (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). While it is hardly evidenced that top-down authoritarian politics are unconditionally accepted or genuinely supported by the public, it is equally challenging to claim that these politics are met with outright rejection or sweeping resistance from below, considering the government has consolidated its political power by gradually implementing these politics.

I assert that the persistence of authoritarian tendencies and the absence of overtly efficacious resistance against them cannot be solely attributed to the success of the political strategy of populism, based on its polarising logic. Nonetheless, as I will argue in this article, the belief in authoritarian regimes' perceived ability to effectively divide society in their favour and consistently consolidate power reinforces this logic as an aspect of masculinist entrenchment, draped in an invincible image of masculine power. I would rather suggest that the very thinking and acting within the authoritarian populist imagination undermine the capability of both the so-called proponents and the opponents of this regime, which prevents them from building alternative political imaginings against the authoritarian populist one (Yetiş, 2025a). Notably, the last local elections in Turkey in 2024 clarified that people are not totally captivated by this authoritarian populist imagination, as evidenced by the overwhelming defeat of the political power. Considering the deepening economic crisis, adding to the social injustices with increasing poverty, deprivation and hyperinflation that began in 2021, polarising discourses were not capable of consolidating political power per se (ibid).

Within the MAS political agenda, anti-genderism serves as a central pillar of such authoritarian populist imagination in two distinct yet interlinked ways. First, it re-operationalises the paternalistic social politics, which is not something emergent in the incumbent political power, but rather indicates a path dependence in conservative, family-oriented social policies since the foundation of the modern Turkish Republic (Yılmaz, 2018). While these policies are always featured by the logic of masculinist protection, more recently, the incumbent regime has put forward mafia tactics undermining the rule of law and protection of policies that guarantee the rights of citizens, especially women and children. In this way, gendered violence, including domestic abuse, harassment against women at work, and in public, becomes permissible if not outrightly condoned. Here, mafia tactics mainly convey the message that no legal or policy structure can protect

women from such violence, but only the incumbent regime can, if women can become compliant with it. Moreover, under these mafia tactics, the incumbent regime takes the practical gender needs of women hostage, especially the protection from violence, which are primarily defined around family-centred policies, by consigning them to social assistance programmes under the tutelage of the Ministry of Family and Social Services and religion-based counselling services provided by the Directorate of Religious Affairs. This hostage situation within conservative social politics also underscores a limitation in the political apprehension of gendered violence by impeding the development of a transformative political imagination that can effectively counter such violence in a comprehensive manner.

Second, in parallel with paternalistic framework, the anti-genderism within an authoritarian populist imagination flesh out a masculine understanding of power, which relays a will-to-power or an insistent desire to remain in power at all costs, by normalising an arbitrary usage of punitive violence against the political dissidents and rivals, and also reinforces its image of being potent and invincible in the face of ongoing economic, political and social turmoils, with an aggressive stance. I describe this masculine understanding of power as masculinist entrenchment exhibiting a performative dimension of authoritarian populist imagination by appealing to the similar mafia tactics. Rooted in masculinist entrenchment, the authoritarian populist imagination capitalises on anti-genderism not only through its polarising logic, but also simultaneously stifling critical thought and trapping people, particularly those dissatisfied with the regime, in a confusing maze. This confusion hinders people's ability to recognise the connections between the MAS political agenda and masculinist entrenchment, and thus, the development of alternative transformative political imaginations. In this sense, the confusion here represents a peculiar kind of *slow violence*¹ (Nixon, 2013) that is precisely in place in order to render violence-producing mechanisms and processes invisible, concealed and misrecognised (Yetiş and Bakırhoğlu, 2023). As a result, it diminishes the potential for political mobilisation and obstructs the formation of robust political solidarity needed to effectively resist both anti-genderism and the MAS political agenda. I employ the concepts of *fatalistic normalisation* and *daunted managerialism* as distinct operations of slow violence, which I developed in my previous studies, to comprehend how various discursive practices present obstacles to fostering political and sociological imaginations in the face of these emergent or ongoing structural problems (ibid), couched in authoritarian populist imagination. Fatalistic normalisation involves actively producing ignorance to prevent awareness and induces a sense of learned helplessness and resignation; whereas daunted managerialism involves postponing awareness in the form of cruel optimism that harbours a glimmer of hope for gradual improvement both in the present and the future, while governing precarious situations by keeping individuals

and communities afloat in their own troubles, thereby preventing broader sociological and empowering political imaginations (ibid).

3 Paternalistic framework and its discontents

In this section, I reintroduce the concepts of fatalistic normalisation and daunted managerialism to illustrate how the paternalistic framework underpins a *conducive context* (Kelly, 2016; Boyle, 2024) as a generative mechanism that enables a range of interlinked forms and multilayered repercussions of anti-gender politics, located within authoritarian populist imagination.

The paternalistic framework is evident in Turkey, rooted in masculinist protection embedded in conservative neoliberal social policies and welfare chauvinism promoted by the MAS political agenda of the incumbent government (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). This framework mainly targets immediate and practical needs, including financial aid for low-income families, especially those led by women caring for children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities (Yetiş and Kolluoğlu, 2022). However, this policy focus potentially compromises long-term strategic goals and empowerment initiatives by reinforcing gendered stereotypes within the framework of traditional family structure. This involves a top-down approach in which those in power make decisions on behalf of the whole society, often assuming they know what is best for people and, thus, can lead to a lack of agency and autonomy for those affected by these policies. It promotes *fatalistic normalisation*, referring to an induced sense of learned helplessness and resignation with the acceptance of systemic issues as unchangeable or inevitable (Yetiş and Bakırhoğlu, 2023). This manifests as a belief that oppressed groups need guidance and control from those in power, reinforcing the status quo and hindering efforts to address the root causes of inequalities and injustices. Such a belief can also lead to *daunted managerialism*, characterised by a bureaucratic and/or charity-based approach to managing social issues, often focused on short-term efficiency and control rather than sustainable social transformation (Yetiş and Bakırhoğlu, 2023). A paternalistic framework can lead to policies that manage rather than address social problems, perpetuating systemic inequalities while seeking to maintain loyalty to the status quo.

In Turkey, the paternalistic framework is adopted and fortified by the ruling power, aligning with the MAS political agenda (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). It is essential to highlight that the paternalistic framework is not a new phenomenon; rather, it reflects path-dependence, indicating a continuation of the family-centred social policies that have dominated the Republic's history (Bugra and Candas, 2011), while the ruling party, Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP), adheres to this in line with Islamist and extremely conservative lifestyles (Yılmaz, 2018). With that said, it can also be argued that women's rights were guaranteed by the modern Turkish Republic and are protected by the civil code, indicating a form of legal paternalism. In addition to this, following Turkey's ratification of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) and the subsequent EU accession processes, women's rights have gradually progressed. Turkey's ratification of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (widely known as the Istanbul Convention) in 2012 marks the pinnacle of progress in

1 Nixon (2013), p. 2 defines slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all." This concept is further developed and concretised with its discursive forms of fatalistic normalisation, daunted managerialism and afflictive condemnation in Yetiş and Bakırhoğlu (2023), which the reader can refer to for a more robust discussion on the interplay of these discursive forms.

women's rights regarding protection from all forms of gender-based violence. The progress is also underpinned by principles of gender equality and anti-discrimination. Meanwhile, the mafia tactics employed by those in political power betray an undercurrent that has sought to gradually reverse this progress, rendering all social and civil protections for women, especially against gendered violence, highly fragile and reliant on the ever-changing political preferences of the incumbent government. In this context, the ruling party's social policies become directly linked to its conservative conception of society, which is consistently viewed as composed of families and religious communities (ibid), while gradually dispensing with the legal basis of paternalism. This demonstrates that political support and approval are often pursued through loyalty and gratitude (Akkan, 2018). The shift in social politics to prioritising social services for families at the expense of women's rights is evident in the renaming of the Ministry of Women and Family to the Ministry of Family and Social Services. The Directorate of Religious Affairs has spearheaded the conservative agenda of the political power (Yılmaz and Albayrak, 2022), which influences women's lives and family dynamics. More recently, for example, the Directorate of Religious Affairs announced a khutba, a sermon delivered during the noon prayer on Fridays, addressing men that all forms of relationships between men and women outside of marriage, including friendship, should be regarded as adultery (T24, 2025). In addition to this, public campaigns have been organised by government institutions against caesarean sections, restricting women's reproductive rights (Bianet English, 2025). As the nation grapples with financial instability due to soaring inflation, President Erdoğan has revealed his intention to propose a new constitutional referendum aimed at safeguarding family values from what he describes as homosexual propaganda (Al-Ali et al., 2025), declaring 2025 the Year of the Family (Kamadan, 2025). This announcement reflects the government's conservative, familial social policies in line with an anti-gender political agenda.

However, the relationship between the masculinist protection rooted in mafia tactics and women's consent to it is rather intricate. Since the 1990s, the incumbent political power has been indebted to conservative and Islamic women, who have played a vital role in its rise and entrenchment (Aksoy, 2015). Therefore, even though anti-gender politics have been adopted to entrench a MAS political agenda, the political power cannot risk losing women's support by overusing forceful and hostile mafia tactics. Instead, political power appeals to a discourse of female vulnerability through benevolent sexism within masculinist protection (Young, 2005), as articulated in both familialist social policies and conservative gender rhetoric promoting the ideal of 'virtuous' women's motherhood and wifely duties (Akkan, 2018). The incumbent government proposed a definition of women's empowerment that aligns with both fatalistic normalisation and daunted managerialism by removing the norm of gender equality, which is characterised by a conservative interpretation of gender justice rooted in nature-imposed 'fitrat'. As *fatalistic normalisation*, this perspective contends that men and women are fundamentally different by a god-given nature and cannot be equal, yet their roles are complementary in sustaining order both within the family and society; thus, they should be treated accordingly. As *daunted managerialism*, an empowerment framework lacking equality norms can still offer some protection and respect for women, as well as bargaining power within the paternalistic framework, provided they adhere to traditional gender roles. In addition to their familial

responsibilities, conservative women, particularly those who wear head coverings, are increasingly asserting their presence in the public sphere. Aligning with this empowerment framework, they are also gaining access to education and job opportunities that were once limited for them under the rules of authoritarian laicism.

These familialist policies and conservative gender rhetoric have been disseminated through state institutions such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Family and Social Services, and pro-government women organisations [such as the Women and Democracy Association (Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği - KADEM)] to maintain a 'women-friendly' façade while condemning women's rights activists and organisations as enemies inside (Unal, 2021) and appropriating gendered needs in line with, and capturing them within, a MAS agenda. Thereby, the political power adopts a mafia tactic by abandoning progressive gender politics and undermining policies ensuring women's access to their rights, such as protection against gendered violence, then posing a threat to women by leaving them unprotected, if not punishing them directly. Moreover, the mafia tactic engages in masculinist protection by remaining as the only refuge from the threat, so long as women condone it. Consequently, masculinist protection entails benevolent sexism and familialism swaying conservative women's political acquiescence, whether we call it bargaining with patriarchy or making a virtue out of necessity. The resulting *cultural intimacy* - through shared values and mutual recognition (Herzfeld, 2016) - between political power and conservative women is an incentive for complicity in or collaboration with the ongoing masculinist entrenchment that undermines women's rights in general.

4 Fatalistic normalisation and daunted managerialism of gendered violence within a family-centred approach

Prevention of violence against women was one of the primary strategic goals of feminist organisations, uniting a broad spectrum of women's organisations to support this agenda (Sancar, 2024). Indeed, the involvement of conservative women's organisations and the Ministry of Women and Family, from which the name of the women was later dropped, in this collaborative politics influenced the outcomes of the strategies and policies adopted. Policies aimed at preventing violence against women were rebranded as policies for the prevention of family and domestic violence. In contrast, the comprehensive discussion surrounding the relationship between male violence in Turkey and the violence arising from militarism, racism, nationalism, and ethnic identity politics—an important topic of critique within feminism—has fallen off the agenda (ibid). We can observe that the women's movement with various counterparts has yet to have a unified understanding on the prevention of other forms of gendered violence, including racism, ethnic discrimination, warmongering, militarism, and violence motivated by religious beliefs. In this situation, the prevalent political strategies aimed at preventing violence against women have seemingly found common ground among various women's groups, particularly concerning the protection and reinforcement of the family, a key focus for conservative agenda. In a pragmatic sense, this unity has enabled the topic to be integrated into the state's agenda, leading to tangible change with a relative improvement of women's rights. By framing the discussion as a matter

of family protection, public institutions were able to adopt the issue of violence against women, resulting in a balancing effect (Yetiş and Kolluoğlu, 2022; Sancar, 2024). However, this family-centred focus has also caused *fatalistic normalisation* of other aspects of gendered violence by sidelining various violence prevention goals that address different types of violence against women, including workplace harassment, gendered pay gap and economic abuse, alongside broader issues of male violence in society. Additionally, a family-centred focus on violence against women dismisses violence against LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming individuals who are excluded from the conservative family structure and are deprived of any legal protection from violence (Yetiş and Kolluoğlu, 2022). This dismissal has resulted in significant consequences, not only normalising the violence against these groups but also creating an opportunity for the conservative incumbent power to promote anti-genderism while heavily relying on anti-LGBTQ+ campaigns and political homophobia.

Recently, we can observe that this family-centred consensus on violence prevention has also been jeopardised and even reversed direction as anti-gender groups claim that these family-centred violence prevention initiatives work against men's interests, portraying men as victims of these policies, destroying family unity. These groups can invoke a discourse of victimhood to justify violence associated with their so-called grievances. Consequently, some domestic violence perpetrators assert that false allegations made by women result in men being victimised by the very laws designed to protect women from male violence, such as the precautionary removal of the accused from the home (Yetiş and Kolluoğlu, 2022). During the campaign against the Istanbul Convention, the anti-rights front vigorously promoted and circulated this argument to generate a moral panic surrounding male victimisation (Unal, 2021). However, political power has construed the argument as aligning with masculinist protection, where aggrieved men resort to violence against their partners out of desperation and depression. In an ironic twist, this discourse surrounding male victimisation was adeptly transformed into a concern for female vulnerability, ostensibly to justify the withdrawal from the Convention under the guise of safeguarding women from lethal violence (Yetiş and Kolluoğlu, 2022). Opportunistic cooperation may also involve the Divorced Victim Fathers Association, which claims to have been alienated from their children post-divorce, and the Platform for Victims of Indefinite Alimony, which argues they were victimised by having to pay indefinite alimony after their divorce. The former group appears to support masculinist restoration by bemoaning the loss of their privilege to control their children and ex-wives, a privilege they had enjoyed due to traditional patriarchal family institutions. The latter group, who claim to be victims of alimony, are transformed from proud men boasting of their privileges as the head and breadwinner of the family, into victimised individuals reluctant to pay for those privileges following a divorce (Sallan Gül, 2019). This transformation may be viewed as the demand for a new set of privileges that aligns with masculinist entrenchment, capitalising on a discourse of victimisation after divorce.

In March 2021, the president of Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention on the grounds that it is damaging family values. This resulted in a public outcry in Turkey, and calls for a liberal social justice approach emerged as a viable alternative to the conservative paternalistic framework (Yetiş and Kolluoğlu, 2022). This is primarily due to its focus on policies and legal reforms that

offer swift solutions amidst the erosion of the rule of law driven by the current top-down anti-genderism efforts. However, the liberal approach suggests a rather single-issue-based and one-size-fits-all perspective, addressing only predetermined needs to achieve equal opportunities and procedural capabilities within the existing social order (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2020). In a liberal approach, *fatalistic normalisation* appears as the view of legal and policy activism as the final recourse on a defined issue as violence against women, which unwittingly undermines social transformation, given the increasing scepticism towards grassroots resistance and an overestimation of bottom-up political support for ongoing anti-genderism (Yetiş, 2019; Yetiş and Özdoğan, 2024), which also inadvertently entrenches resignation and learned helplessness. The liberal approach may also fall into daunted managerialism, where the emphasis on top-down policy and legal reforms leads to a bureaucratic method that prioritises procedural fairness over substantive justice. However, as the rule of law has deteriorated over the past two decades under the ruling power (Cengiz, 2020), this approach hardly helps us understand how the legal and policy instruments have been gradually hollowed out or manipulated in favour of the MAS political agenda. For instance, following Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, various micropower factions and anti-right groups, including tariqat and religious communities, ultra-nationalists, feudal networks, mafia-like organisations, and state-sponsored NGOs linked to political power and Islamist fundamentalist far-right parties, the New Welfare Party (Yeniden Refah Partisi- YRP) and the Free Cause Party (Hür Dava Partisi - HUDA-PAR), are pushing for amendments to Law No. 6284, which pertains to the Prevention of Violence against Women. This movement attacks the primary legal framework that safeguards women from violence. Of course, the legal or policy activism arising against Turkey's paternalistic framework is not solely rooted in a liberal approach; nonetheless, it fails to adequately tackle anti-genderism due to its lack of a transformative political agenda in the face of such authoritarian populist imagination. Thus, this form of activism tends to anchor around managing the alarming consequences of a persistent 'violence regime' (Hearn et al., 2022), such as violence against women with impunity, rather than addressing the root causes of this regime of violence. Meanwhile, the political power, employing a stick-and-carrot approach as its mafia tactic, aims to maintain its women-friendly facade while stifling the rights-based women's movements by keeping them under its control with punitive violence. A notable instance of this is the attempt to dissolve the Platform to Stop Femicide [*Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu*], which faced accusations of the fabricated crime of undermining the family and was even linked to terrorism, culminating in the legal action for its closure (Tahincioğlu, 2022).

However, what remains as a result of the erosion of women's rights is the transformation of violence against women into a managerial issue. The governance of the precarious situation, as *daunted managerialism* was observed in Turkey regarding the increase in cases of violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic measures. Especially during the lockdowns in 2020, there have been increased reports of domestic violence throughout the world, which resulted in the launch of the global UN report and campaign, 'The Shadow Pandemic' (UN Women, 2020). At this point, the Minister of Family and Social Services appeared in a television

programme, presented some statistics regarding incidents of violence against women in Turkey and a select few countries for comparison, and claimed that such an increase happened at ‘tolerable’ levels in Turkey (Çelebi and Özbe, 2021). The statement does not clarify what renders that increase tolerable, nor for whom, but it seeks to illustrate the competent management of violence against women in the country, aligning with the ruling party’s conservative social policy. The acts of violence, which have temporally cumulative and incapacitating effects on survivors’ lives, are tolerated to the extent that they are considered acceptable—a threshold—in the context of conservative social policies that prioritise family unity over the protection and well-being of women (Yetiş and Bakırloğlu, 2023). As I mentioned in the previous section, the Directorate of Religious Affairs has adopted a conservative agenda aligned with the political power (Yılmaz and Albayrak, 2022), promoting anti-gender politics, including the advocacy of traditional female roles by encouraging submission and discouraging divorce, even in cases of domestic abuse. This institution receives significant resources to provide counselling primarily for families and women, while the support services of other institutions (e.g., social work services) are sidelined (Karakaş, 2022).

Accordingly, in Turkey, *fatalistic normalisation* and *daunted managerialism* are evident in the framing of the government’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention as a defence of ‘traditional family values’ as well as women, depicted as in a vulnerable position. Employing anti-gender rhetoric alongside a diluted version of women’s empowerment to garner conservative support, this framing aligns with the logic of the paternalistic framework by portraying gender equality as a threat not only to societal stability and family values but also to women who are assumed fragile by nature and not equal to men. However, beyond this paternalistic framework, masculinist entrenchment offers a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the gendered aspects of ongoing social and political violence aligned with the MAS political agenda.

5 Gendered aspects of violence and anti-genderism within masculinist entrenchment

A more comprehensive understanding of gendered aspects of violence in relation to anti-genderism in Turkey can be attained through the lens of masculinist entrenchment as a mechanism that reinforces patriarchal power structures and suppresses challenges to traditional gender norms by enacting swashbuckling masculinity both in the social and political domains. Masculinist entrenchment refers to the deliberate consolidation of a male-dominated authoritarian populist imagination, frequently through cultural, political, and economic avenues, to maintain control and resist not only progressive gender policies but also entire social movements and political dissidents who oppose authoritarian tendencies. It is mainly rooted in a masculine understanding of power, enforcing violence and making it acceptable as an available instrument of such power. I emphatically employ the term masculinist entrenchment, which strengthens the MAS agenda in Turkey through cultural intimacies (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024), while many other scholars would instead prefer the term masculinist restoration to describe the seemingly same phenomenon (e.g., Kandiotti, 2021; Unal, 2021; Kanci et al., 2023). Essentially, both

terms involve the exaltation of masculine power, allowing for the permissible use of violence against imagined or real enemies under the pretext of being victims and defending themselves. However, masculinist restoration is accompanied by backlashes and compensation or prophylactic strategies responding to social changes towards gender equality and sexual rights (e.g., same-sex marriage, sex education and affirmative action in favour of women’s empowerment), as evidenced by the increasing visibility of the anti-gender movement in some so-called democratic Western societies (Sauer, 2020). Contrary to this, anti-genderism in Turkey should not be viewed merely as a backlash or as a component of compensatory and defensive strategies based on male victimhood. Instead, I contend that the more nuanced understanding of masculinist entrenchment underpins the top-down anti-gender politics that strategically capitalise on masculinist protection, aligning with the discourses of victimhood and self-preservation of the so-called authentic national identity and family. This is rather different from masculinist restoration, which is centred explicitly on male victimisation and grounded in a perception of men losing their social power and entitlement. Masculinist entrenchment is achieved through the enactment of swashbuckling masculinity, which fosters a sense of righteous aggression and violence, appropriating the role of safeguarding the family, state, and nation (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). To address this, we also need *continuum thinking*² for a more encompassing and deeper understanding of gendered violence, extending beyond the persistent violence directed at feminist and LGBTQ+ movements.

To illustrate how masculinist entrenchment has gradually flourished within the authoritarian populist imagination, we must first comprehend its contextual and historical evolution, with political tendencies shifting in direction according to the interests of political power. A remarkable achievement of the political power in its first 10 years was its promotion and enforcement of some improvements in gender equality, including ratifying the Istanbul Convention at the end of these 10 years without an explicit backlash from below (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). This partly explains how political power gained international trust and support, especially from the West, by overselling an image of liberal, pluralist, and tolerant Muslim democracy while also steadily establishing its conservative political hegemony at home (Esen and Gumuscu, 2021; DEMOS, 2024). Nevertheless, especially after 2012, when anti-gender movement aligned with authoritarian populism started to become more influential globally, especially in Western democracies, and the political power in Turkey managed to

² Continuum thinking on gender-based violence, built on Liz Kelly’s (1987) concept of continuum of violence against women, addresses underlying factors beyond individual incidents, such as everyday sexism, women’s poverty and economic dependency, gender pay gaps, political underrepresentation, limited public service access, and sexist stereotyping. This framework illustrates the interconnectedness of distinct forms of violence and how minor aggressions can escalate into severe forms (Boyle, 2024), highlighting the normalisation of behaviours that foster a culture of violence (Kelly, 2016). In Turkey, top-down anti-gender politics and masculinist entrenchment foster a ‘violence regime’ characterized by impunity. The rise of global anti-genderism and authoritarianism worsens local conditions, indicating that global politics provide a wider context for continuum thinking while recognising local differences.

consolidate the majority political support for the constitutional amendment in 2011, the democratic image of the incumbent regime has gradually been abandoned. To further entrench its authoritarian grip, the political power has deliberately negotiated a deal with the EU on containing immigration flows. The EU then turned a blind eye, considering the so-called refugee crisis, which was deemed more important than the defence of democracy (Fassin, 2024). A state of emergency was declared after the failed coup in 2016, resulting in massive restrictions on civil liberties and accelerating democratic backsliding. Anti-gender politics have thus become more effective at enforcing the authoritarian populist imagination, while progressive gender politics have become redundant.

Following this historical trajectory, it is also difficult to observe the political power specifically encouraging the enactment of the discourse of male victimhood or endangered masculinity, not least because it relies heavily on maintaining an image of invincibility and virility rather than holding onto feelings of panic or fear of losing such privileges or power (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). This image is reinforced through the cascading electoral victories of the political power ruling Turkey for over two decades, despite the extending and changing forms of its political alliances. During this period, continuing with its mafia tactics, it has seized control of state institutions and resources, dismantled checks and balances, and acted above the law by portraying any obstacle (e.g., the rule of law) or resistance (e.g., political dissidents) to the reckless fortification of political power as being against the will of the “people” that must be overcome immediately and harshly (Arslantaş and Kaiser, 2023). Thus, the discourses of victimhood and self-preservation maintain rather than restore the masculinist ideal of power. These discourses signify a will to power and privilege over those who are cast out as exploitable, disposable, and punishable (e.g., workers, students, migrants, minority groups, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals). They help attract potential supporters from various groups, including the anti-rights front and micropower factions, who wish to benefit from the status quo and the immunity granted by political power, thus facilitating political alliances that can be easily integrated into the existing political hegemony. It draws on *cultural intimacies* to legitimise patriarchal norms and align them with authoritarian governance (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). This approach reveals how anti-genderism is not just a reactionary movement but a proactive effort to maintain hegemonic power by intertwining gender politics with nationalistic, religious, and neoliberal discourses (ibid). For example, in March 2023, the political power formed political coalitions with two Islamist fundamentalist parties, YRP and HUDA-PAR, which adopt hardline anti-gender positions, specifically demanding the closure of all LGBTQ+ associations alongside other anti-gender demands such as the annulment of Law No. 6284, which pertains to the Prevention of Violence against Women, as mentioned in the previous section. In forming these coalitions, the political power sought to harness the connections, ties, and influences among various anti-gender political forces to broaden political homophobia and anti-gender initiatives (Unal, 2021).

Having promoted the attacks on women’s rights and criminalisation of LGBTQ+ individuals, masculinist entrenchment in Turkey operates as part of a broader authoritarian populist

imagination.³ This imagination not only reinforces patriarchal norms but also integrates them into the fabric of political and social governance, making them harder to challenge. This perspective shifts the focus from isolated acts of resistance to gender equality to a systemic analysis of how anti-gender politics are embedded in cultural, political, and economic structures. In the Turkish context, masculinist entrenchment highlights how anti-genderism operates as a top-down social engineering project. Accordingly, political power appeals to the victimhood discourse strategically to enshrine its authoritarian populist imagination within a self-preservation [beka] discourse of so-called authentic national identity while silencing oppositional voices by employing punitive violence against them. The imagination works through positioning LGBTQ+ individuals and women’s rights advocates against an imagined conservative family model that upholds society’s core values, thereby accusing these groups of undermining it. As a result, political power can utilise extra-legal measures to demonise LGBTQ+ activists and certain feminist groups by isolating their political struggles from one another and other oppositional factions (Zengin, 2024). President Erdogan has solidified his anti-LGBTQ+ stance by openly likening the LGBTQ+ community to a plague and announcing measures to ‘protect the youth’ (Duvar English, 2025a), referencing the government’s ‘Year of the Family’ initiative. These measures were adopted by Turkey’s Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) and the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) as ‘the year of combating LGBT’ by removing access to ‘LGBT-related content’ (Duvar English, 2025b). This culminated in the anti-LGBTQ+ draft law proposed to parliament by HUDA-PAR in April 2025, which criminalises LGBTQ+ identity and activism by portraying them as a threat to social values and family at its core (Geybullayeva, 2025).

Alongside this, as the authoritarian populist imagination is remarkably intolerant of any criticism, the discourse of self-preservation is further enacted by anti-intellectualism. For instance, the Turkish state persecuted Academics for Peace after they signed a petition against the violent repression of Kurdish civilians (Korkman, 2022). Any criticism of the incumbent regime is cunningly translated into an assault on the so-called authentic national identity, depicting the whole nation as victimised. Strategically using the victimhood discourse creates the us-them division in forming political alliances that encompass radical Islamist groups and ultra-nationalists against other groups, including secularist and Kurdish political movements. By doing so, political power has engendered strongman authoritarianism

³ These attacks, however, are not limited to Turkey but are also relevant to other contexts in which anti-genderism with authoritarian tendencies becomes conspicuous (Yetiş and Özdüzen, 2024). More recently, for example, President Trump’s anti-DEI (i.e., diversity, equality, inclusion) rhetoric and its widespread top-down adoption in the US (Boso, 2025) are likely to impact other local contexts as well, precipitating the attacks against women and LGBTQ+ movements, ethnic/racial minorities and immigrants and cutting their ties with broader society. It is important to note that these extra-legal measures are not confined to LGBTQ+ and feminist activists or other marginalised groups in society; rather, they transpire with a performative character of masculinist entrenchment rooted in a swashbuckling masculinity that feels entitled to act beyond the law and inflict punitive violence on those groups that obstruct its path.

(Yolaçan, 2022), deprived the press of freedom, and undermined the constitution, all the while delivering prosperity to its proponents and demonising critical intellectuals and the press. Hence, the masculinist entrenchment in Turkey reflects path dependence on MAS agendas, which involve anti-gender politics and restrictions on academic freedom (Kandiyoti and Emanet, 2017) and the press by appealing to the discourses of self-preservation and victimhood.

Beyond the discourses of self-preservation and victimhood, swashbuckling masculinity also fosters irredentist fantasies of foreign military adventures, such as those in Syria and Libya, and boasting about recent developments in Turkey's defence industry (Elçi, 2024), to stir up patriotism at home, reflecting the will to power. These fantasies are also complemented with the rhetoric of swashbuckling masculinity apparent in President Erdoğan's various statements, such as 'we may come [to Athens] unexpectedly one night' for Greece in 2022 (Çelik, 2022), repeated for Israel in 2023 (Sözcü, 2023). However, it is difficult to assert that these statements invoking swashbuckling masculinity are directly realised in foreign affairs; instead, they are operationalised to entrench the invincible, heroic masculine image of political power and the Turkish state for populist purposes.

In alignment with masculinist entrenchment with mafia tactics, we are recently witnessing a dramatic shift in politics in Turkey (Tol, 2025), from a competitive authoritarianism that bases elections as a key feature to a full-fledged one that casts doubt that elections can ever bring change. The incumbent power has attempted to eliminate its main rival, Ekrem İmamoğlu, as the potential presidential candidate of the opposition (Hubbard and Timur, 2025) by imprisoning him with unsubstantiated and unconvincing accusations. To protest these recent developments, many citizens participating in peaceful public demonstrations, exercising their constitutional rights, were detained and faced incarceration (DW Türkçe, 2025). In response to the rally organisations of the main opposition party, Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) around the country, President Erdoğan threatened them, saying: "Let us see how many more CHP members will perish in the political whirlwind on the path to the presidency" (Sol Haber, 2025). Consequently, the leader of the main opposition party was attacked by someone claiming to be a 'son of the Ottoman' a few days later (Cumhuriyet, 2025). Drawing on this accelerated violence in both politics and society, we can observe how authoritarian populist imagination fleshes out a masculine understanding of power, imparting a will-to-power or an insistent desire to remain in power at all costs by normalising the arbitrary use of punitive violence against political dissidents and rivals. The political power also attempts to maintain its image as potent and invincible in the face of ongoing economic, political, and social turmoil, adopting an aggressive stance of swashbuckling masculinity.

6 Concluding remarks for a transformative political imagination

Considering this detailed demonstration of how masculinist entrenchment operationalises violence while conveying an insistent will-to-power, and how gender-based needs and issues - especially the need for protection from violence - are taken hostage and appropriated by masculinist protection with mafia tactics, we need to understand how the development of feminist mobilisation with a transformative political imagination against ongoing anti-genderism in Turkey is

more important and necessary than ever. Transformative political imagination should provide a more comprehensive understanding of gendered violence, aligning with a broader social justice framework that can call forth societal change by going beyond the generative mechanisms underlying the existing injustices and paving the way for empowerment not only for individuals but also for collectives (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2020). Establishing and nurturing an environment for diverse actions and possibilities, along with imaginations that are unrestricted by existing mechanisms, is crucial for a transformative approach. Here, transformative political imagination transpires as an active manifestation of empowerment in our everyday lives, becoming a key site to resist social injustices and violence. Rather than viewing vulnerabilities, sufferings, and incapacities as inherent traits of individuals, cultures, and systems, we should scrutinise the systems and environments that constantly reproduce these vulnerabilities, sufferings, and incapacities, along with the relationships established within these frameworks. All these factors - structures, situations, and connections - help us understand the causes behind ongoing injustices.

A transformative political imagination can strengthen the claims and objectives of the feminist social justice framework by underscoring the visibility, power, and autonomy of women's and LGBTQ+ movements resisting top-down anti-genderism and its repercussions. However, as demonstrated throughout the article, top-down anti-gender politics increasingly pose a threat to these movements and diminish their ability to connect with broader society (Yetiş, 2025b). To overcome the restrictions imposed by an authoritarian populist imagination, a transformative political imagination must dismantle *spontaneous sociology*,⁴ primarily based on the assumption that gender issues serve as the Achilles heel of society because the majority of the population is socially conservative. Consequently, this assumption overestimates the grassroots inclination towards the anti-genderism championed by those in power, by taking ongoing popular support for the incumbent regime as self-evident. This kind of assumption functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy, in the form of *fatalistic normalisation*, that not only takes for granted the polarising logic surrounding gender issues but also leads to a thought paralysis that prevents any potential political imagination from mobilising people to resist authoritarian populist imagination, given that gender issues are treated as hostages under such imagination. It should be noted that this assumption is also held by the political opposition, and their ability to mobilise is hindered by their failure to engage with gender issues in politics. Based on this assumption, opposition parties—except for a few—appeal to *daunted managerialism* in an attempt to accommodate the concerns of the incumbent's supporters and win them over to regain a legislative majority (Somer, 2024). However, this approach risks detaching from their activist base (ibid.), leading many voters to view them as overly compliant with authoritarian populist imagination or even colluding with the MAS political agenda. Weakening ties with societal opposition reduces their ability to leverage contentious politics, which may ultimately be essential for reversing backsliding (ibid.). The failure of political opposition is most

⁴ *Spontaneous sociology* refers to the common-sense, uncritical, everyday interpretations of social life without formal sociological analysis, prone to reproducing dominant ideologies (Bourdieu et al., 2011; Burawoy, 2017).

apparent when political power and its alliances invoke majoritarian rhetoric to amend laws and the constitution in favour of their interests, while negotiating gender issues related to the criminalisation of LGBTQ+ individuals and the restriction of the sexual lives of many others based on Islamic beliefs.

Nonetheless, countering this trend is not beyond imagination, as we notice that when the ruling power seeks to remove its main competitor as the prospective presidential candidate of the opposition, these efforts have encountered significant public demonstrations in nearly every city in Turkey, including those noted for being socially conservative and pro-government (Anka News Agency, 2025). Furthermore, in order to demonstrate their solidarity and protest against the ongoing authoritarian crackdown, more than 15 million people, including those who would normally politically condone the incumbent political power, went to vote for the main opposition's preliminary election to determine the presidential candidate (BBC News Türkçe, 2025). These recent developments disenchant the age-old sociological and political clichés about Turkey that at least 60 per cent of the population are natural supporters of right-wing conservatives, which reflects a nationalist and conservative self-stereotypical imagination. Although ongoing public demonstrations do not eliminate the established boundaries shaped by authoritarian populist imagination, they reveal that these boundaries can become blurred and reshaped by the very context of public protest and alternative forms of dissent, conveying a shared discontent as mediating spaces (Yetiş, 2025a). A similarly courageous grassroots mobilisation could well be organised against top-down anti-genderism and masculinist entrenchment by countering aggressive stances of swashbuckling masculinity, alongside discourses of self-preservation and victimisation.

To counter this trend, it is also essential to consider men's engagement in this ongoing resistance, not only because the top-down anti-gender politics pose an increasing threat to the women's and LGBTQ+ movements and diminish their ability to connect with broader society, but also because this politics heavily relies on a masculine understanding of power (Yetiş, 2020). This illustrates how political decisions and actions related to a gendered understanding of power are supported by a punitive mechanism created and maintained by the incumbent regime's securitarian agenda. To develop and disseminate a transformative social justice addressing the anti-genderism as in the service of authoritarian populist imagination, we need to broaden our understanding of gendered violence in a more nuanced and comprehensive manner to decipher the ongoing social violence under the masculinist entrenchment.

To achieve this, we must employ *continuum thinking* to offer a more comprehensive, intersectional, and inclusive understanding of gendered violence across its various dimensions and forms. This approach transcends the binary framework of men's violence against women. Even though gendered violence is primarily conceptualised as violence against women, *continuum thinking* critically expands its definition, including violence against LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming individuals, violence directed towards men and boys, violence between men, as well as the ongoing militaristic culture and practices both in times of conflict and during everyday life in so-called peaceful times (Cockburn, 2010; Graff and Korolczuk, 2021; Boyle, 2024). Following *continuum thinking*, we not only

embrace a more comprehensive understanding of gendered violence but can also attain insight into how the different forms of social violence and injustices are imbued with gendered violence in a *conducive context* of anti-gender politics and how men are involved in these. This not only provides a deeper understanding of gendered violence in relation to anti-genderism but also widens the frontiers in resisting such violence and strengthens the mobilisation in this direction.

Thus, the potential engagement of men should strengthen the connection between the feminist social justice movement and broader society, empowering collective social action against anti-gender politics. To this end, it is essential to understand the significance of the women's and LGBTQ+ movements and their struggles for rights, both in the past and today. Such engagement must connect these rights to specific real-world problems and struggles rather than leaving them as abstract principles. Nonetheless, men may find it challenging to adopt a feminist and gender-sensitive perspective due to their controversial positions in the feminist movement and to engage with it (Yetiş, 2019, 2020, 2025b; Yetiş and Kolluoğlu, 2022). To ensure men's involvement in feminist social justice endeavours, alliances should be forged where women and LGBTQ+ individuals hold key positions in the socio-political realm. Additionally, men must nurture alternative imaginations that convey their interests and align with political-ethical stances supporting these initiatives (Yetiş, 2025c). Nurturing and deploying these alternative imaginations, scholars and activists can gain a deeper understanding of the interplay between gender, power, and authoritarianism. This will offer a more comprehensive critique of anti-gender movements. It will also highlight the importance of addressing the structural and cultural dimensions of these movements to effectively challenge their entrenchment.

Author contributions

EY: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

Funding

The author(s) declare that financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article. This work was supported by the UK Research and Innovation [Grant Reference: EP/X030504/1].

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated

organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

- Akkan, B. (2018). The politics of Care in Turkey: sacred Familialism in a changing political context. *Soc. Polit.* 25, 72–91. doi: 10.1093/sp/jxx011
- Aksoy, H. (2015). Invigorating democracy in Turkey: the agency of organized Islamist women. *Polit. Gender* 11:1. doi: 10.1017/S1743923X1500001X
- Al-Ali, N., Altay, T., and Galor, K. (2025). "Introduction: anti-genderism, homophobia and far-right politics in the Middle East and Europe" in *Resisting far-right politics in the Middle East and Europe*. eds. N. Al-Ali, T. Altay and K. Galor (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press), 1–34.
- Anka News Agency. (2025). *CHP'nin Konya mitingi ilklere sahne oldu*. Görülmemiş kalabalık meydana doldurdu, "hak, hukuk, adalet" sloganı attı. Anka News Agency. Available online at: https://ankahaber.net/haber/detay/chpni_konya_mitingi_ilklere_sahne_oldu_gorulmemis_kalabalik_meydani_doldurdu_hak_hukuk_adalet_slogani_atti_236326 (Accessed May 5, 2025).
- Arslantaş, D., and Kaiser, A. (2023). The 'competitive authoritarian' turn in Turkey: bandwagoning versus reality. *Third World Q.* 44:61. doi: 10.1080/01436597.2022.2147061
- BBC News Türkçe. (2025). *CHP ön seçim: İmamoğlu resmen cumhurbaşkanı adayı ilan edildi*. BBC News Türkçe. Available online at: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/c4gem3mevzzo> (Accessed May 5, 2025).
- Bianet English. (2025). *Turkey restricts planned C-sections amid vaginal birth campaign*. Bianet English. Available online at: <https://bianet.org/haber/turkey-restricts-planned-c-sections-amid-vaginal-birth-campaign-306635> (Accessed May 4, 2025).
- Boso, L. A. (2025). *Fear and Hope for LGBTQ rights in the second trump administration*. Available online at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5116579>.
- Bourdieu, P., Chamboredon, J. C., and Passeron, J. C. (2011). "The craft of sociology: epistemological preliminaries" in *The craft of sociology*. ed. B. Kraus (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter).
- Boyle, K. (2024). "What's in a name? Theorising the inter-relationships of gender and violence" in *Interconnecting the Violences of men*. eds. K. Seymour, B. Pease, S. Strid and J. Hearn (Abingdon: Routledge).
- Bugra, A., and Candas, A. (2011). Change and continuity under an eclectic social security regime: the case of Turkey. *Middle East. Stud.* 47, 515–528. doi: 10.1080/00263206.2011.565145
- Burawoy, M. (2017). On Desmond: the limits of spontaneous sociology. *Theory Soc.* 46, 261–284. doi: 10.1007/s11186-017-9294-2
- Campos, R. D. E. (2023). The International Turn in Far-Right Studies: A Critical Assessment. *Millennium* 51, 892–919. doi: 10.1177/03058298231198992
- Capeheart, L., and Milovanovic, D. (2020). *Social justice: Theories, issues, and movements*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Çelebi, E., and Özbey, E. E. (2021). *For women in Turkey, the struggle continues*. Social Europe Forum. Available online at: <https://www.socialeurope.eu/for-women-in-turkey-the-struggle-continues>.
- Çelik, B. (2022). *Erdogan'dan ayı nazarat: Bir gece ansızın gelebiliriz, bu bir rüya değil*. Diken. Available online at: <https://www.diken.com.tr/erdogandan-ayni-nazarat-bir-gece-ansizin-gelebiliriz-bu-bir-ruya-degil/> (Accessed May 5, 2025).
- Cengiz, F. Ç. (2020). Proliferation of neopatrimonial domination in Turkey. *Br. J. Mid. Eastern Stud.* 47:693. doi: 10.1080/13530194.2018.1509693
- Cockburn, C. (2010). Gender relations as causal in militarization and war: a feminist standpoint. *Int. Fem. J. Polit.* 12, 139–157. doi: 10.1080/14616741003665169
- Cumhuriyet (2025). *Saldırgan "Osmanlı çocuğuyum" demişti, Sezgin Tanrıkulu saldırıyı anlattı*. Available online at: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/saldirgan-osmanli-cocuguyum-demisti-sezgin-tanrikulu-saldiriyi-2335182> (Accessed May 5, 2025).
- DEMOS. (2024). *Toplumsal Cinsiyet Karşıtı Anlatılarla Mücadele: STÖ ve Aktivistlerin Deneyimleri*. Available online at: <https://demos.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/demos-rapor.pdf>.
- Duvar English. (2025a). *Erdogan likens LGBTI+ community to a 'plague,' vows to take measures against*. Duvar English. Available online at: <https://www.duvarenglish.com/erdogan-likens-lgbti-community-to-a-plague-vows-to-take-measures-against-news-65595> (Accessed May 5, 2025).
- Duvar English. (2025b). *Turkey's year of family becomes 'year against LGBTI+*. Available online at: <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkeys-year-of-family-becomes-year-against-lgbti-news-65764>. (Accessed May 5, 2025).
- DW Türkçe. (2025). *Türkiyedeki protestolarda 260 tutuklama*. Deutsche Welle Türkçe. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/tr/t%C3%BCrkiyedeki-protestolarda-260-tutuklama/a-72053347> (Accessed May 5, 2025).
- Elçi, E. (2024). "Authoritarian populism," in Lindstaedt, N., and van den Bosch, J. J. *Research handbook on authoritarianism*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 42–58.
- Esen, B., and Gumuscu, S. (2021). Why did Turkish democracy collapse? A political economy account of AKP'S authoritarianism. *Party Polit.* 27:722. doi: 10.1177/1354068820923722
- Fassin, É. (2024). *State anti-intellectualism & the politics of gender and race: Illiberal France and beyond*. New York: Central European University Press.
- Geybullayeva, A. (2025). *The new anti-LGBTQ+ bill proposed to the Turkish parliament, branded as a 'manifesto of hate'*. Global Voices. Available online at: <https://globalvoices.org/2025/04/24/the-new-anti-lgbtq-bill-proposed-to-the-parliament-branded-as-a-manifesto-of-hate/> (Accessed May 5, 2025).
- Graff, A., and Korolczuk, E. (2021). *Anti-gender politics in the populist moment*. Abingdon: Taylor and Francis.
- Gutiérrez Rodríguez, E., Tuzcu, P., and Winkel, H. (2018). Introduction: feminisms in times of anti-genderism, racism and austerity. *Women's Stud. Int. Forum* 68, 139–141. doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2018.03.008
- Hall, S. (2021). "Popular-democratic vs authoritarian populism: two ways of 'taking democracy seriously'" in *The hard road to renewal: Thatcherism and the crisis of the left*. ed. S. Hall (London: Verso), 123–149.
- Hearn, J., Strid, S., Humbert, A. L., and Balkmar, D. (2022). Violence regimes: a useful concept for social politics, social analysis, and social theory. *Theory Soc.* 51, 565–594. doi: 10.1007/s11186-022-09474-4
- Herzfeld, M. (2016). *Cultural intimacy: Social poetics and the real life of states, societies, and institutions*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hubbard, B., and Timur, S. (2025). *In Turkey, critics of Erdogan see democracy eroding after Istanbul mayor's detention*. The New York Times. Available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/22/world/middleeast/turkey-erdogan-democracy-istanbul-mayor-detention.html> (Accessed March 23, 2025).
- Kamadan, Y. (2025). *Why Erdogan declared 2025 as the 'year of the family'?* TRT World. Available online at: <https://www.trtworld.com/turkiye/why-erdogan-declared-2025-as-the-year-of-the-family-18254109> (Accessed February 22, 2025).
- Kancı, T., Çelik, B., Bekki, Y. B., and Tarcan, U. (2023). The anti-gender movement in Turkey: an analysis of its reciprocal aspects. *Turk. Stud.* 24:189. doi: 10.1080/14683849.2022.2164189
- Kandıyoti, D. (2021). "Locating gender in contentious politics" in *Gender, governance and Islam*. eds. D. Kandıyoti, N. Al-Ali and K. S. Poots (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press), 215–218.
- Kandıyoti, D., and Emanet, Z. (2017). Education as battleground: the capture of minds in Turkey. *Globalizations* 14, 869–876. doi: 10.1080/14747731.2017.1325170
- Karakaş, B. (2022). *Biz Her Şeyiz: Diyanet'in İşleri*. İletişim.
- Kelly, L. (1987). "The continuum of sexual violence" in *Women, violence and social control*. eds. J. Hanmer and M. Maynard (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK), 46–60.
- Kelly, L. (2016). *The conducive context of violence against women and girls*. Discover Society. Available online at: <https://archive.discoverysociety.org/2016/03/01/theorising-violence-against-women-and-girls/> (Accessed February 23, 2025).
- KONDA. (2019). *Türkiyede Toplumsal Cinsiyet Raporu: Hayat Tarzları 2018 Araştırması*. Available online at: <https://konda.com.tr/rapor/22/hayat-tarzlari-toplumsal-cinsiyet>.
- KONDA. (2020). *İstanbul Sözleşmesi*. Available online at: <https://konda.com.tr/rapor/11/istanbul-sozlesmesi>.
- Korkman, Z. K. (2022). Transnational solidarity? Academia and the politics of knowledge, translation, and (Im)mobility. *Fem. Form.* 34, 166–190. doi: 10.1353/FF.2022.0007
- Machado, R. P., and Vargas-Maia, T. (2023). *The rise of the radical right in the global south*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Molyneux, M. (1984). Mobilisation without emancipation? Women's interests, state and revolution in Nicaragua. *Crit. Soc. Policy* 4, 59–71. doi: 10.1177/026101838400401004
- Morrison, J. (2022). *The left behind: Reimagining Britain's socially excluded*. 1st Edn. London: Pluto Press.
- Nixon, R. (2013). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*, first Harvard University press. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

O'Neil, M. L., and Çarkoğlu, A. (2022). *Türkiye'de Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kadın Algısı Araştırması 2022*. Available online at: <https://gender.khas.edu.tr/sites/gender.khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/TTCKAA2022-5.pdf>

Sakki, I., and Hakoköngäs, E. (2025). "Populism as political imagination: theoretical approaches" in *Qualitative approaches to the social psychology of populism unmasking populist appeal*. ed. I. Sakki (London: Routledge).

Sallan Gül, S. (2019). *Mağrur Erkeklikten Mağdur Erkekliğe*. Kazete Internet Gazetesi. Available online at: <https://www.kazete.com.tr/magrur-erkeklikten-magdur-erkekliğe>.

Sancar, S. (2024). *Siyasetin Cinsiyeti: Cinsiyetçiliğe Karşı Kadın Hakları Siyaseti*. İstanbul: Metis.

Sauer, B. (2020). "Authoritarian right-wing populism as masculinist identity politics. The role of affects" in *Right-wing populism and gender: European perspectives and beyond*. eds. G. Dietze and J. Roth (Berlin: Springer Verlag).

Sen, A. (1980). "Equality of what?" in *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Somer, M. (2024). A long Battle: Turkey's backsliding and resistance through trench warfare. *Ann. Am. Acad. Pol. Soc. Sci.* 712, 77–92. doi: 10.1177/00027162251318839

Sol Haber. (2025). *Erdoğan: Bakalım Cumhurbaşkanlığı hevesi yolunda daha kaç CHP'li telef olup gidecek sol haber*. Sol Haber. Available online at: <https://haber.sol.org.tr/haber/erdogan-bakalim-cumhurbaşkanlığı-hevesi-yolunda-daha-kac-chpli-telefon-gidecek-397904> (Accessed May 5, 2025).

Sözcü. (2023). *Erdoğan: Bir gece ansızın gelebiliriz*. Sözcü. Available online at: <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/canonicalUrl> (Accessed May 5, 2025).

T24. (2025). *Diyanet'ten tartışma yaratacak hutbe: Kadın erkek arkadaşlığı kişileri zinaya sürüklüyor*. T24. Available online at: <https://t24.com.tr/haber/diyanet-ten-tartisma-yaratacak-hutbe-kadin-erkek-arkadasligi-kisileri-zinaya-surukluyor> (Accessed May 4, 2025).

Tahincioglu, G. (2022). *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu, bu yüzden kapatılmak isteniyormuş: Akıl almaz suç duyurusu, fişlemeler ve "ahlaka aykırılık" iddiası*. T24. Available online at: <https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/gokcer-tahincioglu-yuzlesme/kadin-cinayetlerini-durduracagiz-platformu-bu-yuzden-kapatilmak-isteniyormus-akil-almaz-suc-duyuru-fislemeler-ve-ahlaka-aykirlilik-iddiasi>.

Tol, G. (2025). *Turkey is now a full-blown autocracy*. Foreign Affairs. Available online at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/turkey/turkey-now-full-blown-autocracy> (Accessed March 23, 2025).

UN Women. (2020). *COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls*. Available online at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls> (Accessed July 14, 2025).

Unal, D. (2021). "The masculinist restoration project in the rhetoric of anti-gender movements" in *The culture and politics of populist masculinities*. eds. O. Hakola, J. Salminen, J. Turpeinen and O. Winberg (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books), 67–88.

Yetiş, E. Ö. (2019). *Türkiye'de erkeklerin şiddet hakkında algı, düşünce ve deneyimleri*. Ankara, Turkey: Ankara University. Available online at: <https://dspace.ankara.edu.tr/items/ebc99816-1660-42ef-abc8-0be10daa78b3/full> (Accessed November 4, 2024).

Yetiş, E. Ö. (2020). Erkeklerle Şiddeti Konuşmak: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temelli Şiddeti Anlama ve Önlemede Erkek Katılımını Psikososyal Yaklaşımın Sunduğu İmkanlar Üzerinden Düşünmek. *Fe Dergi* 12, 187–200. doi: 10.46655/federgi.843002

Yetiş, E. Ö. (2025a). Beyond authoritarian populist imagination: recognising indistinctive boundaries for democratic resistance. *J. Psychosoc. Stud.* 1, 1–6. doi: 10.1332/14786737Y2025D000000037

Yetiş, E. Ö. (2025b). Resisting top-down anti-genderism: engaging men in feminist social justice. *Humanit. Soc. Sci. Commun.* 2025:5501. doi: 10.1057/s41599-025-05501-8

Yetiş, E. Ö. (2025c). "Erkeklerle Yürütülen Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temelli Şiddeti Önlemeye Yönelik Çalışmalarda Kesişimsellik Yaklaşımının Sunduğu Analitik ve Pratik İmkanlar" in *Kesişimsel Feminizm: Teoriden Sahaya Uzanan Kesişimsellikler*. ed. D. Altınoluk (Ankara: Töz), 55–79.

Yetiş, E. Ö., and Bakırhoğlu, Y. (2023). Fatalistic normalisation, daunted managerialism and afflictive condemnation as forms of slow violence. *Humanit. Soc. Sci. Commun.* 10:630. doi: 10.1057/s41599-023-02147-2

Yetiş, E. Ö., and Kolluoğlu, P. (2022). *Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temelli Şiddetin Çözümünde Erkekler*. Nika.

Yetiş, E. Ö., and Özüzzen, Ö. (2024). Anti-genderism in Turkey: masculinist entrenchment through cultural intimacies. *Women's Stud. Int. Forum* 107:103014. doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2024.103014

Yılmaz, Z. (2018). "The AKP and the new politics of the social: fragile citizenship, authoritarian populism and paternalist family policies" in *Populism and the crisis of democracy*. eds. G. Fitz, J. Mackert and B. Turner (Abingdon: Routledge).

Yılmaz, I., and Albayrak, İ. (2022). *Populist and pro-violence state religion: The Diyanet's construction of Erdoğanist Islam in Turkey*. 1st Edn. Singapore: Springer.

Yolaçan, S. (2022). Iron fist or nimble fingers?: an anatomy of Erdoğan's strongman politics. *Hist. Anthropol.* 33:48. doi: 10.1080/02757206.2021.1946048

Young, I. M. (2003). The logic of masculinist protection: reflections on the current security state. *Signs J. Women Cult. Soc.* 29, 1–25. doi: 10.1086/375708

Young, I. M. (2005). "The logic of masculinist protection: reflections on the current security state" in *Women and citizenship*. eds. N. Yuval-Davis and P. Werbner (New Delhi: Zubaan).

Zengin, A. (2024). *Violent intimacies: The trans everyday and the making of an urban world*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.